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ABSTRACT

This study examined inservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, surveying teachers' perceptions of their professional competence in working with special education students and in collaborating to plan and implement instructional programs. Professional training needs were also identified. Teachers from 90 schools in southeastern Alabama completed questionnaires. Graduate students (most of whom were inservice teachers) from one teacher training institution also completed questionnaires. Many schools where the study occurred were implementing inclusion at the same level. Nearly 60 percent of respondents had a negative attitude toward full inclusive education; only 27 percent agreed with inclusion. Over half perceived inclusion as a practice that only benefited special education students socially and did not produce a positive classroom learning climate. Perceptions differed between special and general educators, with special educators being more positive about the benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities and more interested in learning about collaborative teaching. Differences in attitude were evident by gender, teaching experience, and grade level. Barriers to inclusion included time constraints due to large class size, negative attitudes, inadequate training to handle inclusion, and lack of teacher collaboration. The most needed area of training was collaborative practice between special and general educators. (Contains 26 references.) (SM)

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Teachers' Attitude toward Inclusion and Perceived Professional Needs for an Inclusive Classroom

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Teachers' attitude toward full inclusion and
perceived professional training needs for an inclusive classroom

Introduction

Full inclusion is a growing trend in American education. It is mandatory in some school districts. Research indicates that teacher attitude toward full inclusion and shared teaching, along with their competence is the keys to successful implementation of an inclusion program (Bergren, 1997; French & Pickett, 1997; Pugach, 1992; Sindelar, et al., 1995). Research also indicates that teachers, both general and special education, lack professional training in working collaboratively among themselves to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities although a large number of them hold a positive attitude toward the inclusion movement (Bergren, 1997; Roberts & Mather, 1995; MacGregory, 1994). As a result, the need to promote in-service and pre-service teachers' skills in collegiality and improve their professional preparation for teaching special needs students is becoming more and more important.

Historically, American teachers and students have been separated by categorizing and labeling as general teachers/students and special education teachers/students (Welch, 1996). Teacher education programs functioned accordingly, i.e., offering mainly categorical degree programs for prospective teachers. Only recently has an interdisciplinary approach for service delivery been practiced in some teacher education programs to prepare prospective teachers for planning and providing accommodation services for students with disabilities. The movement, however, has not been widely implemented. According to Williams (1990), nearly half of first-year teachers indicated that they did not feel prepared to teach students with disabilities. A national survey (Rojewski & Pollard, 1990) reported that approximately one third of secondary teachers attended only one course designed for teaching students with disabilities. This dilemma in

teacher preparation has been and will continue to be a hindrance to the success of all students in both academic and social aspects of the school experiences.

Collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers has never been emphasized as strongly as it is now as a result of the full inclusion movement (Wood, 1998). For the benefits of all children, although full inclusion is a controversial topic, general education teachers and special education teachers need to join their efforts in modifying their instruction approaches to meet the instructional and social needs of all students. Thus, the purpose of this study was 3 dimensional: 1) to investigate in-service teachers' attitude toward inclusion, 2) to survey these educators' perception of their professional competence in working with special education students and working collectively in planning and implementing instructional programs, and 3) to identify the needs for further professional training.

Methodology

This study was conducted through a 28-item questionnaire, which was developed with the reference of the instrument by Bergren (1997). Six items were used as independent variables and the other 22 items were dependent variables designed to measure in-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and perception of teacher competence regarding factors of effective co-teaching. A 5-point Likert scale was developed (1 = strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= no opinion, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree).

Twelve elementary and secondary schools from 90 schools in the southeast region of Alabama were selected though cluster sampling. Each selected school's participation was approved by the school district. Following the approval, the survey instruments were mailed to the school principals with prepaid returned envelopes. The principals were asked to deliver the instrument to each teacher in the school. Participants in the study also consisted of graduate students (most of whom were in-service teachers) enrolled in the College of Education of a regional southern teacher training institution in Spring Quarter, 1998. Two hundred ninety-nine questionnaires were sent out and 163

participants returned their responses. The returning rate was 54.5%. Due to the uneven proportion between special education teachers and general education teachers in schools, separate variance estimate of t-test was reported in statistical analysis.

Many of the schools in the region where the study was conducted were implementing the inclusion of students with disabilities at nearly the same level. The participants in this study responded with their perception of full inclusion, that is, special needs students were fully included in a general classroom, and a special education teacher came to the general classroom as needed to provide supplemental services or to provide a complete instructional program for the students with disabilities.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis provided a general profile of the participants' demographics. Among the 163 participants, 25 were males, 135 were females and 3 did not identify their gender; 134 were general educators, 17 special education teachers and 9 identified themselves as others, e.g., teachers in the programs of Chapter 1, reading recovery. Seventy-three were teachers of K-3rd grades; 33, 4th to 6th grade teachers; 24, middle school teachers (7th and 8th grades); and 22, high school teachers (9th-12th grades). Forty six percent (75 respondents) held a bachelor's degree, 50.3% held a Master's and 2 respondents had an educational specialist (EdS) degree.

T tests were conducted to detect the existence of differences between general education teachers and special education teachers, and between male and female participants. An ANOVA was used to examine the existence of statistically significant differences according to levels of teaching, teaching experience and education degrees. In reporting the study results, the α-level was chosen as .05, that is, significant difference was recognized when P value was less than .05.

The results indicated that 59.5% of the participants indicated a less than positive position toward inclusion. Twenty-seven percent surveyed agreed with the inclusion movement while 11.7% indicated no opinion. The data in Table I indicate specific problems and concerns about full inclusion expressed by the participants.

The perception between general education and special education teachers was examined by t-test. Significant differences were demonstrated as shown in Tables 2 and 3. A separate variance t-test was also used because of the size differences of the two groups. It is not surprising to note that special education teachers responded more favorably about the benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities, in their competencies for working in the inclusive classroom, plus a strong desire to learn more about collaborative teaching practices than expressed by the general education teachers in the study.

The separate variance t test values between male and female teachers indicated that male and female teachers held similar perception to most statements in the questionnaire. There were, however, four exceptions. Male teachers held a stronger belief than female teachers with regard to: 1) "pull-out" resource appointments make extra work for the classroom teacher (mean for males=2.20 and females=2.70), 2) Inclusion benefits special needs students socially (mean for males=2.04 and females=2.54), and 3)Special needs students benefit more from collaborative teaching than in a "pull-out" program (mean for males=2.44 and females= 3.21). On the other hand, male teachers had a significantly more conservative opinion than female teachers about the necessity of modifying the grading system for special needs students (mean for males = 2.84 and females=2.12).

Professional experience among the participants was categorized into one of four levels, 1-3 years , 4 to 6 years, 7-10 year and 10 years plus of teaching experience. An ANOVA was used to compare the responses from the four levels. Table 4 shows the significant differences in teaching experiences among the respondents. The differences fell into the percentage of teachers believing in the benefits of collaborative teaching for all students and professional training in this area. A greater percentage of new teachers (71%) and teachers with 7 to 10 years of teaching (87.5%) valued collaborative teaching highly than teachers with 4 to 6 years of teaching (46%) and teachers with 10 more years of teaching (61%). For the second statement in Table 4, it is interesting to note that approximately 30% of teachers at each level did not claim their position, and at the same

time 62.5% of teachers with 7-10 years of teaching experiences, 53% with 1 to 3 years of teaching experiences, 43% with 4 to 7 years of teaching experiences and 37% of 10 more years of teaching experiences agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. In terms of the teachers' own perception of their previous training in modifying instruction for special needs students and interest in in-service training programs dealing with collaborative teaching practice (Statement 3, Table 4), the statistical results revealed that teachers with fewer years of teaching experience (64% of teachers teaching 1-3 years and 78.5% of teachers teaching 4 to 7 years while 44% of teachers of 7-10 years and 43% of 10 more years of teaching) do not think they had adequate training in instructional modification. At the same time, a majority of the respondents expressed an interest in receiving training in collaborative practices at the three levels (79% of new teachers, 61% of teachers with 4 to 7 years of experience and 81.3% of those who had been teaching for 7 to 10 years) and only 51% of teachers with 10 more years of teaching did so.

Table 5 shows significant differences among the participants who taught at the four grade levels(K-3, 4-6, 7-8 and 9-12). Overall, 48.4% of the participants believed that special needs students benefit from general education instruction. High school teachers were least supportive for the statement with 27% agreeing and 59% disagreeing while 62.5% 7th to 8th grade teachers, 36% 4th to 6th grade teachers and 49% of K - 3rd grade teachers agreed with the statement. It is notable that the higher grade the participants taught, the more likely they were to perceive it difficult to justify the modified assignments for special education students to general education students in the same class. That is, 90% of high school teachers indicated the difficulty while 52% K-6th grade teachers and 71.6% 7th-8th grade teachers held the opinion (See Table 5). In terms of the unnecessary increased workload for the general education teacher by the inclusive education practice, only 46% of the teachers in grades 7 and 8 so stated this concern while 64% of the high school teachers and 70% of the kindergarten to six grade teachers expressed this concern. The participants teaching at different levels agreed to a different extent of the inadequacy of their training in modifying instruction for special needs

students (64% of k-3 grade teachers said so, over 50% of 4-6 grade teachers, 29% of 7-8 grade teachers and over 50% of high school teachers). Moreover, more than 70% kindergarten to 8th grade teachers expressed an interest in receiving instruction on collaborative teaching and only 50% of high school teachers did so.

Responses to the two open-ended questions reiterated the participants' responses to survey questions and reinforced their concerns and needs for training. The responses to greatest barriers for inclusion can be ranked as follows: 1) not enough time for students because of a large class size, such as 29 students in one classroom, or multi-level children (LD, MD, Chapter I, gifted and average) in a classroom, 2) negative attitude toward full inclusion practice, 3) inadequate training to handle the situation, and 4) lack of collaboration among teachers. The additional issues were indicated as not having enough special education teachers, helping the special needs students at the expense of the general education students, lack of support from the administration, concern about liability, and disciplinary problems created by the students with disabilities.

The most needed area of training, as identified by 50 of the respondents, was collaborative practices between special and general education teachers. Some suggested that the two groups of teachers should receive the training collegially. The second most needed area of training was knowledge of different categories of disabilities. Other specific training areas included lesson modification, learning styles, teaching to different levels of students, characteristics of special education students in relation to the general education students, time management, special education laws, regulations and expectations. The responses also reflected frustrations experienced by some teachers, such as "Everyone suffers!", "I need a special education degree!", "More keeps being added. We don't have time to teach."

Discussions

The findings produced a counterpoint toward full inclusion and also some unique results that echoed local concerns. Results of this study reflected the vocalized concerns of in-service teachers from day to day. These included full inclusion regardless of the

degree of disabilities and the difficulty they encounter in dealing with multi-levels of disabilities and including a large number of learners with disabilities in their daily teaching practice. The distinct results from several previous studies (Bergen, 1997; Wang & Reynold, 1995; Houck & Rogers, 1994) which revealed a positive tendency toward full inclusion among teachers once again highlights the controversial nature of the full inclusion movement.

Several possible reasons may account for the unfavorable attitude demonstrated in this study: a larger percentage of special education students in the geographic area, lack of adequate training among teachers in assisting students with multiple disabilities, and lack of understanding of the profound social and political implications of inclusive education as an effective approach to the equity of the best education for both general education students and students with disabilities. The last reason given for opposition was the inappropriateness of the full inclusion movement regardless of the severity of the disabilities.

Segregation of students with disabilities from the mainstream has been maintained longer in Alabama than in many other states. When adoption of an inclusion program is required, an immediate implementation of full inclusion is difficult to justify, and also within the educational arena, full inclusion has not been widely accepted as an effective practice in a general education classroom (Lieberman, 1996).

The resistance, concern for, and lack of understanding expressed by the respondents, mirrors the climate in 1975-76 with the passage and implementation of PL 105-17 (Flynn, et al., 1978; Johnson & Cartwright, 1977; & Miller, 1990). Many administrators and teachers had a misunderstanding about what was meant by "Least Restrictive Environment". This misconception still persists and is now complicated by the introduction of the "inclusion" movement. Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), like its predecessor, PL 94-142, mandates that individuals with disabilities must be educated in the least restrictive environment. The 1997 reauthorization of PL 101-476 required that justification be given as to why a special needs learner is not being educated

in the general education classroom. The emphasis of IDEA's reauthorization is on meeting the needs of the learner with disabilities in an environment that is as close to the general classroom setting as possible. This placement should be dictated by the needs of the students, not the needs of the school system (Wood, 1998). The full inclusion practice is a mechanism to assist the school system in meeting the needs of learners in a general education environment if that is determined to be the least restrictive environment. Through accommodations of the general education curriculum, or implementing of a different curriculum, modifying of teaching methods, use of different materials and technology, and use of supplementary materials and support personnel, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) Team must decide if the academic and social needs of the students with disability can be adequately met in the general education classroom. Research has indicated that when inclusive placement of special needs learners into the general education classes precedes adequate in-service training of general and special education teachers and administrators, little to no benefit is experienced by either the school system, or more importantly, the students (general and with disabilities) (West & Idol, 1990). In practice, an inadequate training of classroom teachers to meet the needs of both general education and special education students, seems to hinder acceptance of the positive benefits of the inclusion movement. These researchers and others have identified training as the key to the success of the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom (Vaughn, et al., 1997, Schumm & Vaughn, 1992 & Dunn, 1968).

The State of Alabama, in the implementation guidelines for PL 105-17 (IDEA), clearly state that the general education classroom be considered first as the "least restrictive environment." If the IEP Team deems the placement in another setting to be more appropriate, the team must furnish written justification for that placement. Lack of knowledge about accommodations appropriate for the learners with disabilities or sufficient time for planning interferes with a successful implementation of the policy. This highlights current concerns by both general education and special education teachers regarding accountability. The mandated policy can change placement of special education

students from a total exclusion to the mainstream or to full inclusion. Unfortunately, lack of classroom practitioners' endorsement and positive involvement in implementation of the policy, accountability for both special education and general education students' success would be a concern as to a successful implementation of full inclusion. Inclusive placement of special education students manifests itself as a challenge to educators, administrators and parents because it is a newly emerging educational practice and outcome of the multicultural education movement. Alabama is a state with a higher poverty level, a large number of minority people in its population (26%) and a lower level of students' academic achievements (M. Johnson, personal communication, July 23, 1998). These conditions may aggravate the difficulty in the implementation of inclusive education practices. It has been well known that the categorization of special education students is always associated with race, poverty, gender and language. According to Lipsky & Gartner (1996), among mentally retarded students in Alabama, 47% were African American students, which over represents its population. Alabama students' test scores on standardized tests have been nationally ranked near the bottom for years (Henry, 1996 & 1997). Alabama classroom teachers have been teaching in a multiculturally diverse community and have been waging the battle against poverty and racial bias, no matter whether or not they have been appropriately trained with a sound multicultural education perspective. Therefore, they may need a longer time and more practice to comprehend the social and political impact of this newly emerging practice so as to implement it effectively.

In spite of the overall opposition position to full inclusion, the majority of the participants expressed the desire for professional development in the modification of instruction, identifying different needs of special education students and collaborative teaching practice. As the respondents indicated, collaboration should begin with formal training and daily implementation of inclusive education within the school building. This finding is parallel to the national trend in the need for teacher education programs. In 1997 Teacher Education Rules, the Alabama State Department of Education has eliminated the

categorical training for special education teachers (Rules of the State Board of Education, 1997). Thus, the Collaborative Teacher model that is currently used is increasingly needed for training of both in-service general and special education teachers, in order to implement the least restrictive environment provisions of the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA.

More than 55% of the participating teachers perceived inclusion as a practice that benefited special students only socially, not academically and that doesn't produce a positive learning climate in the general education classroom. This perception shadows the purpose of the full inclusion movement. A recent case study, however, by a special education teacher in the same region where this study was conducted (Dunaway, 1998) concluded that the longer a non-identified mentally retarded child is fully included in the general education classroom, the better the child is able to achieve academically. In addition, the study illustrated that the critical factor in working with a fully inclusive student is a realistic expectation for the child against the adverse preponderance of "labeling". More longitudinal studies of special education students' academic achievements prior to and following the inclusive practice are needed to verify the benefits and cost of the practice. Students' perception on inclusion should also be investigated before the conclusion is made about whether a positive learning climate can be created with the inclusive placement of special education students.

Conclusions

As a mandated educational practice in many of the schools in this study, full inclusion has become a concern and aroused a heated debate among classroom teachers. The participants in this study demonstrated a negative position toward full inclusive education. However, their desire and need for professional training in modification of instruction, identifying different needs of special education students and collaborative teaching practices in both the special and general education teachers have been identified. The information would be helpful for teacher educators in making decisions for their in-service and pre-service programs. Since a counterpoint toward full inclusion resulted from

this study and educators hold different opinions toward full inclusion, further studies of the movement are in need to guarantee its effectiveness for both special and general education students and for both social and academic gains of students with disabilities.

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Table 1. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion

Questionnaire Items	Strongly Agree(%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree(%	Missing (Person)
1. More time is spent teaching a special needs student than a general education student.	31.9	41.7	9.2	10.4	5.5	2
2. it is necessary to modify instruction for special education students.	49.1	46.0	0.6	1.8	1.8	6
3. Modifies assignments for special needs students are hard to justify to other students in class.	20.9	35.6	9.2	28.8	5.5	0
4. "Pull-out" resource appointments make extra work for classroom teachers.	20.2	26.4	17.2	26.4	6.1	6
5. "Pull-out" resource appointments are the best way of accommodating a special needs student's learning problems.	17.8	33.1	27.0	14.7	5.5	3
6. Inclusion benefits special needs students socially.	14.1	56.4	6.1	16.0	7.4	0
7. Inclusion benefits special needs students academically.	3.7	27.0	14.1	39.9	12.9	4
8. Inclusion produces a positive learning climate in a general education classroom.	3.1	20.2	20.2	41.1	13.5	3
9. Inclusion increases workload of a general education teacher.	24.5	38.7	14.1	16.6	5.5	1

Table 2. Comparisons between general education and special education teachers

Questionnaire Items	Educators	Means	T Value	P
1. Inclusion benefits special needs students socially.	General	2.56	2.39	0.025
	Special	2.00		
2. Special needs students benefit from instruction in the general education classroom.	General	3.02	3.04	0.006
	Special	2.18		
3. Modified assignments for special needs students are difficult to justify to other students in class.	General	2.50	-2.88	0.009
	Special	3.29		
4. "Pull-out" resource appointments make extra work for the classroom teacher.	General	2.45	-3.41	0.003
	Special	3.47		
5. Inclusion of special needs students produces a positive learning climate in the general education classroom.	General	3.51	3.11	0.005
	Special	2.82		
6. Inclusion unnecessarily increases the workload of a general education teacher.	General	2.25	-2.88	0.009
	Special	3.06		
7. Consistent modification of teaching strategies benefits both special needs and general education students.	General	2.39	2.50	0.015
	Special	1.82		
8. Collaborative teaching increases communication and improves instruction for all students in my classroom.	General	2.78	2.17	0.041
	Special	2.18		
9. I have adequate training to modify instruction to accommodate special needs students.	General	3.32	4.17	0.000
	Special	1.94		
10. I am interested in learning more about collaborative teaching between general and special education teachers.	General	2.53	3.04	0.006
	Special	1.82		
11. I have adequate knowledge about learning characteristics of special needs students.	General	3.11	4.24	0.000
	Special	1.82		

Table 3. Descriptive comparison between general and special education teachers

Questionnaire Items	Educators	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Missing
1. Inclusion benefits special needs students socially.	General	14	52	7	18	9	
	Special	24	64		10		
2. Special needs students benefit from instruction in the general education classroom.	General	5	38	15	33	9	
	Special	12	59	6	17		6
3. Modified assignments for special needs students are difficult to justify to other students in class.	General	24	38	8	24	6	
	Special	5	24	5	65	0	
4. "Pull-out" resource appointments make extra work for the classroom teacher.	General	22	29	16	23	5	4
	Special	6	12	29	35	17	
5. Inclusion of special needs students produces a positive learning climate in the general education classroom.	General	4	15	17	46	16	2
	Special	0	41	35	24	0	
6. Inclusion unnecessarily increases the workload of a general education teacher.	General	29	41	11	13	5	
	Special	0	41	24	24	12	
7. Consistent modification of teaching strategies benefits both special needs and general education students.	General	16	46	16	13	6	2
	Special	35	53	5	5	0	
8. Collaborative teaching increases communication and improves instruction for all students in my classroom.	General	8	34	30	17	9	2
	Special	17	41	24	12	0	
9. I have adequate training to modify instruction to accommodate special needs students.	General	6	28	7	45	13	
	Special	41	29	0	24	0	
10. I am interested in learning more about collaborative teaching between general and special education teachers.	General	12	48	19	14	6	
	Special	24	59	6	6	0	
11. I have adequate knowledge about learning characteristics of special needs students.	General	5	37	6	45	6	6
	Special	41	35	0	17	0	

Note: % was used in reporting the numbers.

Table 4. Comparison among teachers with different years of teaching

Items	F Value	Pro>F
1. Collaborative teaching between two teachers benefits both general and special education students.	2.73	0.04
2. Collaborative teaching increases communication and improves instruction for all students in my classroom.	2.83	0.04
3. I have adequate training to modify instruction to accommodate special needs students.	3.37	0.02
4. I am interested in learning more about collaborative teaching between general and special teachers.	5.67	0.00

Table 5. Comparison among teachers teaching different grades

Questionnaire Items	F Value	Pro>F
1. Special needs students benefit from instruction in the general education classroom.	2.87	0.038
2. Modified assignments for special needs students are difficult to	3.09	0.029
3. Inclusion unnecessarily increases the workload of a general education teacher.	5.05	0.002
4. I have adequate training to modify instruction to accommodate special needs students.	3.94	0.01
5. I am interested in learning more about collaborative teaching between general and special education teachers.	3.78	0.012

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